
Measure

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Gideon

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Faith Sievers

Measure

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poems by

J.G.

Another World

J.G.

You stand in one part of my world;
Too far to grasp, to hold.
I try to converse with you in private,
for our safety.
I know my feelings for you,
but are there feelings for me from you?
I know that we cannot be seen by others.
They would never understand.

You and I hide behind facades;
Masks that society deems acceptable.
We know each other's truths,
for we know what's beyond the mask.
It hurts me to no end
that we cannot be together.
We will never be understood.

I see you in two forms;
the true you and the social you.
You have sports and friends
that make you stand out.
That status pushes me back
even further into the

darkness.

Your social self has begun to take over.

Why is that so?

Your true self,

the caring, loving, nurturing you
is more believable.

Why does your mask have to sting?

The mask that stings is the mask that frightens;
makes me feel there is no us.

You are so close, yet so far.

I want to say I love you,

but know I cannot.

We may only say it in our safety,
our quietness, our thoughts.

Even then you do not,
out of fear;

Fear of society.

We cannot be verbal or physical
because it is not right
according to your friends,
your society.

That I'll never understand.

Autumnal Thoughts

J.G.

The fading leaves of autum,
ever changing
from green as the vernal grass
to yellow, a brazen azure
to orange, glowing from the season
to red, their last hope of life
to brown, the earth from which they came—
grasping onto the threshold of life,
their respirator,
their umbilical cord to mother nature—
becoming frail,
decrepit,
exhausted,
ragged—
fall to their deaths without ever being noticed,
until it is too late.

The aged man,
wrinkled, tired, and forlorn,
reminiscing on the ages gone by—
of births of children and grandchildren,
of passions unspeakable,
of personal accomplishments,
of moments lost in anger,
of the thought of leaving this world,
flipping through photo albums,
his only means of survival,
falls to his knees and prays that he will be released
without being noticed,
without a thought, care, or worry.

The Turtle

J.G.

The turtle,
ever cautious, rather slow,
green and brown, almost like the grass after winter;
minature cousin of extinct reptiles—
 never vicious, always reluctant, shy, and inward—
trapped within a hard, armoured home
which he never leaves;
always watching the cars as they
 race by, too fast for him,
 waits patiently for the long tiring day
 to end.

He,
the boy in the corner,
straight, blonde hair with the cowlick in the front,
 large part in the center—
aping the reptile,
 cautious, frightened, uncertain,
trapped within a fantasy world which only he understands;
 always watching others do what he wishes to do,
 publicly, open—
having to play a game,
 an act that sickens him to protect himself,
 fantasizes about the other boy at the front of the
classroom, knowing he may
never have the chance,
 like the turtle not having a chance to
 cross the road.

Why must the frightened and misunderstood sit, hands tied,
and watch the world go by?

Samson's Idol

Erin Roach

Everything I'm not, he is.
Everything he does, I can't.
His mind is a collection of William Blake stories,
while mine is just a page from a children's book.
He has a jumbo box of 96 crayons,
and I only have the 8 pack.
I am inspired by him, and he thinks I steal his thoughts.
Only he can make something out of nothing.
His cat knows, but mine doesn't—
probably because it is his.
I thought it was his hair,
but it's gone, and he is still the same.
His fingers move quickly and mine stand still
for hours.
I am lost, and he is saved.
I am his little clone, and he knows it.
Following him through a world that is only clear to him.
Flowers, monsters, and women fill his room.
They bring him solitude, but they scare me.
The screams are beautiful to him.
Whispers are beautiful to me.
Still I follow him.



All Eyes on Me??

Kim Chrustowski

They sometimes say that people are either extroverts or introverts. I definitely fall into the introvert category. I think that it was around the time that I was in seventh grade when I first considered myself as this. I hold a nun responsible for determining just how introverted I really am.

I attended a Catholic grade school and was forced to go to church a grueling three times a week with the mass of Friday being for the ENTIRE school. There were a whole heck of a lot of kids at Saint Thomas More; at least three hundred!

Bible readings were reversed for those in the seventh and eighth grade. Some priest or nun got the crazy idea that it was an honor to be forced to read to an audience of peers. I think it was just a trick to get us to go up and read because the teachers didn't want to do it anymore.

Then somehow it happened. "Kim, I think that you would be good, how about a Friday mass reading?" I was called on to read at a *Friday* mass! What was my teacher Sister Therese thinking? Had her habit been too tight that day? "You have got to be kidding," I mumbled under my breath and laughed with the others because I thought that it was a joke at my expense. Fine, laugh on kids, I'll be the one sitting in the pew just waiting for you to mess up on that holy altar.

Then nothing...no more laughing, just looks of regret and relief from my classmates who were not picked. "Sweet Jesus," I thought, "She is serious! I actually have to do this!" My hand shot up before I knew it and said, "Thank you so much for the honor, but I am due for a bout of laryngitis that day, sorry." Sr. Therese responded, "Oh, how lucky for you because the mass to bless throats is coming up next and I will keep you in my prayers until then, Kimberly." I cringed in horror at being called by my full name because that meant Sr. Therese was serious. Can you believe that she, a nun, didn't care?

My lunch hour, what I lived for in those days, was cut short for practice, and I was forced into church with two other little people given the same sentence. The church seemed huge with no one in it; the only sound was the roar of an old vacuum cleaner somewhere off in the distance. I was told to genuflect before I jumped onto the altar. My friends, who thought they knew how, bowed quickly and then proceeded up the stairs. I didn't know what genuflect meant but I followed suit quickly bowing to God like you would to the Queen of England.

I had to climb a flight of stairs that could only equal those leading up to the Eiffel Tower just to reach the microphone. When I finally reached the top, I saw just how big the church really was, I nearly fainted dead away. It was like looking out onto Wrigley Field, except I never wanted to faint at the sight of Wrigley like I did here. The church had rounded walls like Wrigley, but these walls were covered in tiny marble pebbles, not ivy. I could barely see the pebbles, although I knew that they were there from the many times that I would pull them off in order to hear the "CLING" when they hit the metal rail on the floor. Boy, did that make the teachers mad!

There were at least 500 pews in the place of bleachers. In place of hot-dogs and beer, there were hosts and wine in the church. The aisles were covered with a red carpet rather than grey cement, which led up to the white marble altar where I stood, a good thirty feet from the ground. I would have given anything to be *anywhere* else but here.

When I looked at the microphone; it blocked out the entire church, that is how *big* it was! My teacher showed me the page I was to read. She was round as a weeble-wobble (she even wobbled when she walked! Side to side!) and was dressed in the color of death and destruction, black (how fitting), that nuns used to always wear. I had liked her, until now. She was torturing a small child, and just between you and me, I think that she got a kick out of it. How could she be so mean? She wasn't going to get into heaven for this, nun or no nun.

I found my place and spoke no louder than a whisper. I was told to speak up and when I heard my voice echoing off the far walls, I was awe-struck. It was like when babies first recognize themselves in a mirror. Hey, that is *my* voice. After a few encouraging words from Sr. Therese, I found that it was actually fun. I could do this all day; well not really all day, maybe just one more time.

I did nothing but practice in the few days that I had before my reading debut and I think that I may have even been saying it in my sleep. And then came Friday morning and I got to thinking about what I would really have to do and who would be there to hear me. Oh, geez, Tim and Joe and Brian would all be there, not to mention the older boys. I had had a crush on Tim since the first grade! What if they made fun of me? What if my skirt was tucked into my day-of-the-week underwear and no one told me? There was no way in hell that I was going to school that Friday.

You want to know how I handled this? I threw up! I was so scared that I threw up and missed school that day! Nothing to do but watch TV and have my mother bring me food on a Pac-Man metal food tray and think about the poor stiff that they had gotten to take my place at mass.

Well, Sr. Therese was not very happy, but that was okay. I beat her. Besides, she was going to hell for torturing me anyway. That was my first and thankfully last brush with fame. If I had the chance to do it all over again, the only thing that I would change is that I would have thrown up on Sister Therese's shoes. ▣

Ethiopian Chicken Soup

Amy Ceader

1 Ethiopian chicken, 1 large onion, celery, potatoes, noodles, spices (sage, garlic, etc.), alarm clock, bag, plane ticket, map, native guide, knife, snake bite kit, provisions, tranquilizer gun and tranquilizer darts, Vitamin C, whiskey, athletic shoes.

You're sick? How's about some chicken soup? You've had some of your mom's and grandmom's? That's not good enough. You need to have soup made from the rare delicacy —the Ethiopian chicken. First you need to fly to Ethiopia and hire a native guide. Now remember, Umbufu is a native and knows the area better than you do. Get a good night's sleep before you and Umbufu venture out.

Set your alarm clock early because many people will be hunting. Eat a light breakfast, take plenty of Vitamin C and wear your athletic shoes. You will need them to catch the chicken. They are fast!

Make sure to take the snake bite kit. All sorts of disgusting things are about. Take the map in

case you are separated from Umbufu. This way you will know where to wait for him.

Bring a bottle of whiskey with you. You may need it as an antiseptic and a pain killer, in case there are injuries. After you catch the chicken, you will need to celebrate. Well, you must sample it musn't you! Yes, that's quite good.

Umbufu, I see him! I see him! Better hand me the bag. What do you mean, no? A lion! Give me that gun. Got him! Good, now we have some time to catch the chicken. I need another drink. I need to catch that thicken. I think I'll have abother. Gat's thood!

Let's get him. There he is. It's too far to get him. Damn! I need another drink. Dat's good. Umbufu, I see him. Hand me the bag. Got him. I bet he's gonna taste mighty good.

That was might good soup wasn't it Umbufu! I did think the chicken was a bit on the stringy side. By the way, where are my shoes?

poems by

Faith Sievers

Colors of Thought

Faith Sievers

She sits
Pleased by the sensation of color.
Lights veer and retract,
Shatter and divide
In a series of dazzling splashes—
Shrinking, leaking, exploding,
Folding and pleating like protoplasm.

For a while
It does not mean anything to her
Except different kinds of brightness,
An extensive field of light
In which everything
Appears to be in motion,
A confusion of forms and colors,
Soft and dream-like.

But then she sees
Tatters of clearness through the pervading obscurity,
Until finally the grass comes into focus—
Terribly fine and utterly clear of image,
Surreal, sharp as razors,
Seething and writhing and alive,
Flexing like fingers
And grabbing on every side.

So she stands.
All the blood in her body crashes to her feet
And then instantly to her head.
Then come the faces—
Flashing and sneering,
Talking and laughing—
Unknown classmates and friends,
Her family and those long dead.

She glimpses a person
Who was once her lover
And calls out to him
With fond nostalgia,
But his features register no recognition
And she is astonished
That they are now strangers.

As she gazes,
The faces gather momentum,
Spinning and pulsating,
Whirling and twirling;
She begins to fall and tries to cry out,
But she makes no sound.
She just falls and falls, sickeningly dizzy
In the thickening colors that envelop her.

Mother

Faith Sievers

I want to hold you so tight that
It would take away your urge to cry,
To ease your pain by telling you of
The beauty you contain.
But how can I convince you of
My sincerity, my concern?
What can I say that will
Strike a chord, make you learn...
What will cause more than a slow shrug,
A sigh, a weak and momentary smile?
How can I hold you up if you
Stand stoop shouldered, arms limp,
And you turn your face away?
If you choose not to listen, decide not to believe,
What can I say?!

Summer Painting

Faith Sievers

Enamel paint clings to bristles
Like the sap in my hair after climbing
The big pine in our neighbors' yard
When I was nine.

Oozing from the bark and catching the light,
It was too tempting not to be touched.
It dripped like honey,
But tasted of earwax.

Much tugging and coaxing that evening
Achieved nothing except for
Whimpers and whines;
Mom said it would have to be cut.

The brush follows the line of the eye
In slow, steady strokes,
Giving the satisfaction of perfect pleasure and control—
Like climbing.

No Words

Faith Sievers

It seems that the place my words are waiting for is an ocean so
wide that most waves never reach the sound or the shore.
Or perhaps a space so small that there is room for nothing
except silence.

On the coastline my soul cries out in pain, as melancholy and
mournful as the song of the whale.
And in that cramped space, so minute, so irreducible, my
soul holds its breath, squeezes its eyes shut, suffocates
in self.

Insomnia

Faith Sievers

I have lost track of the number of nights when he sleeps,
And I contemplate the beauty of a face at pure peace.
Sometimes as I trace my fingers across the contour of his cheek,
Sadness is blended in my mind with all of the loveliness I have
 known,
And I organize my thoughts in stacks of nickels and dimes
As if they will add up to more than worthless this time,
As if they will stop jingling about so.
But I, always too tired to sleep,
Often end up counting minutes, counting sheep,
Sighing and whispering, "I love you."
To the darkness of the room.



An Event

Robert Garrity

"I can give you one, but not your buddy here." A slight smile that was almost a silent sneer crossed the face of the paunchy bartender.

The year was 1956 and the place was Columbia, South Carolina. His chevronless new uniform blending with the brown of the floor and the bar against which the soldier leaned did not at all impress the man who had served hundreds of soldiers on weekend pass after their completion of basic training.

Accompanied by Tommy, the young private had asked for two beers. Tommy, despite his six foot six body, stayed shyly a pace behind the other. He had been a deejay on a Baltimore radio station before being drafted, and he had accompanied his new-found friend to Columbia that hot Saturday afternoon. Tommy was very tall, very quiet, and very black.

"Get the two beers for me." The white Pennsylvanian calmly looked at the bartender, who opened two Budweisers and quietly asked, "Need a glass?"

Dropping a half dollar on the bar, the young private picked up the two bottles and walked out the door. Tommy followed, not even looking back at the open-mouthed bartender.

Once outside the bar, the two soldiers sat on the curb and began drinking their cold brew, all the while wondering what there might be to see in the capital city. Scarcely two minutes had passed before the policeman approached them.

"You boys know it's illegal to drink on the sidewalk? Better get those beers inside that bar."

Both men stood as the shorter one replied, "But they won't let us drink in there." A few passersby slowed in their walking to see what the problem was.

"Y'all may think you're still up North, but down here we have certain rules about such things. We use different bars." The policeman was beginning to frown and to redden a bit. As if in rehearsed concert, the two recruits handed the Budweisers to the policeman and turned toward the bus stop.

"Wonder if that cop'll be arrested for having beer on the sidewalk," laughed Tommy. The two boarded the Fort Jackson bus and imagined the policeman carrying the two Buds into the bar. Their laughter was strained. Both were then silent for a long time.

Tommy thought of the slurs cast upon him at age six, age ten, age fifteen when his growth spurt had silenced the slurs but not the attitude of producing them. His companion thought of the reaction in his neighborhood when he and his teammates had asked black Jimmy to be catcher on their baseball team — two years before Jackie Robinson's coming to the Brooklyn Dodgers.

Each basic trainee looked at the other and was able to see a glistening tear in an eye of the other. They were silent for the rest of the trip back to camp. ▣

Untitled

Jeff Hall

I can see it far away
far away across the room
shining in the sunlight from the window
it's one of man's simplest tools
And there's this really annoying buzz
buzzing in my head like it's surround sound
buzz, buzz, buzz
If I only had a 10 ft arm
I could reach into nothingness and obtain the tool
and beat the hell out of the fly
But I probably won't
because I'm too damn lazy
so I'll just lay here
while this constant buzzing drives me to insanity
Because when I'm insane, it won't matter anymore
because how many crazy people know how to use a
flyswatter
Perhaps the flyswatter doesn't exist
perhaps I've already become insane
I'll just sit here and learn the language of the fly
Buzz, buzz, buzz



Take Off Your Clothes

Rachel Barlage

The moment I walked in the door and put down my bag, I knew I wasn't staying. At first I was shocked, and then I turned in embarrassment to face a wall, bright with an ecstatic mural of a jungle, complete with parrots, tropical flowers, and of course, a long snake coiled around the trunk of a tree.

"Ha, ha," I murmured. "The garden of Eden." He had walked in behind me, and I felt him wrap his arms around my waist and rest his chin on my shoulder. I knew he was smiling. "You bastard!" I whispered viciously.

"What?" He began to nibble playfully on my ear, and I pushed him away, not turning to face the twenty-five or thirty naked people who were eating dinner at the long table in the middle of the room.

"If you think I'm spending my summer at a nudist colony, you've got a big surprise coming."

"I thought you said that you wanted to do something different. 'I want to broaden my horizons,' you said. 'I want to experience a new culture.' If this isn't a new culture, I don't know what it is."

"I wanted to go on a safari or a tour of South America. Jesus Christ, I can't believe I trusted you to make all of the plans. I thought it would be so romantic not to know where we're going."

"I told you that you'd be surprised."

"You were right." We had been planning a month-long summer vacation together for three years, almost as long as we had been dating,

Amon's parents had agreed to fund our trip as a graduation present. Shortly after we returned home, Amon would begin working as a graphic designer in a small but prestigious advertising firm. I was still circling ads in the Classified's and searching the Web for something I wanted to do. Our parents were talking about marriage, but that was something that we discussed only in "you never know" terms.

Staring at the vibrant colors on the wall, I hoped that Amon had not brought me here to propose to me. I could just see him showing off a large diamond on my finger and telling his free-spirited art major friends that he had asked me to marry him in front of a room full of naked people. They would love it.

"Can I help you with your bags?" A short, large-breasted woman walked up and picked up our suitcases, which, ironically, were filled with clothes. "My name is Clara," she told us as she walked briskly toward a staircase, not waiting to see if we would follow.

"Come on," Amon urged, taking my hand and pulling me after him. I stared at the tie-dye swirls on the back of his Grateful Dead T-shirt to avoid facing the dining nudists. The staircase was narrow. Two middle aged men squeezed past us on their way down, their testicles bouncing up and down as they approached us on the steps. Amon turned and grinned at me. He was trying not to laugh.

Clara led us to a small room at the end of the hall and put our suitcases down at the end of the double bed. There was a large window overlooking an orchard outside. Original watercolors adorned the pale blue walls.

"I hope you'll be comfortable here. Agnes is the coordinator of the summer programs. She'll be here in about an hour to show you around and answer any of your questions. I look forward to spending the summer with you." She gave us a cheerful smile and asked if we needed anything.

"Nope. Everything's fine," Amon replied. "And I'm Amon. This is Caroline."

"It's nice to meet you. I'll see you downstairs," she chirped, walking out the door. She was in good shape for someone her age. I guessed that she was about forty, but she wasn't sagging anywhere. I stared at the patterns on the quilt that lay across the bed, waiting for Amon to say

something before I told him we were leaving.

“I told you that you over-packed.” He began to laugh, quietly at first, and then wildly, his entire body shaking.

“It’s not funny! I’m sick of being the butt of your stupid jokes.”

“You should have seen the look on your face!” He was trying to control his laughter, but he couldn’t and exploded into hysteria. I smiled and tried to repress my own laughter, tears gathering in my eyes. When I finally laughed out loud, he began to laugh even harder. He sat down on the bed and pulled me on top of him. We lay together laughing for several minutes. Then, when the laughter had faded, I felt like I did after sex, shaky and euphoric. I lay in his arms and thought about how was going to get out of this. I felt his fingers moving through my hair, and I quivered.

“Goddammit,” I sighed, “That’s not fair. You know what that does to me.”

“What,” he asked, his fingers working their way up my hair until he was gently massaging the back of my head. “This?”

“Yeah, that,” I whispered. “No.” I sat up. “Amon, I don’t want to stay here. It was funny, ok? But we’re not staying. Everyone’s *naked*,” I added in exasperation.

“I knew that you would be uneasy about this, but I swear to God that you’ll like it once you get over your nervousness. I told you I spent a few weeks at a nudist colony in California with my uncle when I was eight. When I got back, I didn’t even *want* to wear clothes.”

“You still don’t want to wear clothes. God, I have to make sure you’re dressed before I let you open the door. I know you like to walk around without any clothes on. Fine. I’ve gotten used to seeing your bare ass, but I’m one of those weirdos who actually likes to wear shirts and jeans and, yes, even socks.”

“Caroline, I wouldn’t have brought you here if I didn’t think you would be happy. It’s so natural. You become more comfortable with your own body and with seeing other people’s bodies. ...What does our society have against nudity anyway? There’s nothing dirty about our bodies.”

“Here we go again. I know there’s nothing dirty about our bodies, but—”

“Then what’s wrong? What part of this do you have a problem

with?"

"I don't have a 'problem' with any of it; I just don't want to do it."

"Why? You have a beautiful body." I could feel my cheeks burning, and for a minute I thought I was going to cry.

"I do not."

"What's wrong with your body?" I paused while I decided if I should answer.

"I'm too skinny."

"Better than being too fat."

"Shut up."

"I'm just kidding, sweetie. You are not too skinny. You're perfect."

"I'm flat-chested," I protested. "I have no breasts."

"Neither do I."

"I'm being serious, Amon."

"Caroline, who cares how big your breasts are? The people here are not going to be checking you out. Have you seen one perfect body since we walked in here? Nobody's perfect. You see them at the same time that they see you. It's totally open."

"I guess. I just feel safer with clothes on. More in control maybe."

"Take off your clothes," he said, standing up and pulling his shirt over his head.

"No!"

"Come on, just take off your clothes. Do it for me. Spend a half hour in this room with me, totally naked, and if you don't want to stay after that, we'll leave." His jeans were on the floor, and his socks flew through the air and landed in a corner. His boxers were the last to come off, and he threw them at my head. "It's just me. Don't you trust me? You know, I've seen you naked before." He began to tug on my shirt, and I took a step back.

"I don't know."

"It feels good! the breeze on your skin.... It feels really good. You're just afraid that you're going to like being naked." I looked at him standing in the middle of the room without any clothes on. He looked ridiculous, but I knew he was serious. I studied his face, and his eyebrows were slightly furrowed in determination. I knew that look.

"Fine."

"Fine?" he was teasing me now. "Want me to help you?"

"No. You can't touch me. That wasn't the part of the deal."

"Yes, ma'am." I took off my shoes first, and then my socks, one by one. I could feel him watching me. I took off my jeans next, and I was suddenly relieved that I had decided to shave that morning. Then I took off my shirt. I stood for a minute in my bra and underwear, and then I removed my bra. Again, I just stood still. There was something about pubic hair that was really personal. I had always thought that people just shouldn't see anyone else's pubic hairs. I took off my underwear. Amon clapped.

"Good for you."

"I feel stupid."

"You don't look stupid. Close your eyes. Doesn't the breeze feel great?" The calico curtains were dancing in the the draft that came in from the orchard. I closed my eyes.

"Yes," I said, surprised. Honestly, yes." It was a hot day, and the orchard air caressed my skin. I felt a thin layer of salt harden just beneath my breasts, which were damp with sweat. Looking down to the floor, I saw an elastic line on my stomach, just below my belly button.

About forty minutes later, he was standing with his hand on the doorknob.

"You'll be fine," he promised. "Just imagine everyone in their underwear." When he smiled, I was struck by the overwhelming knowledge that I loved him. For that one instant, my awareness of my love for him was as clear and as powerful as it had ever been. He opened the door and walked into the hallway. I watched his pale bare feet move across the wooden floor, and I followed him. The floor felt rough on the soft, tender soles of my feet, and I walked quickly so I could stand close behind him. As I came to the top of the staircase, I prayed that I wouldn't meet anyone on the way down. ▣

poems by

Heather Moser

Balance

Heather

“My sheets are striped,” she confides,
“so I look taller at night.
And did you know I make Jello
in Mr. Coffee?” she continues
as she checks her silk plant for signs of growth.
When she was small she would shape
little people out of twist-ties
from the Wonderbread bag
and Crayola them green so they would feel at home
playing in the grass.
“I think the sun is just a star brave enough
to break curfew,” she told me once.
She paints her thumbnail with white-out
as she lectures me: “Your life is in disorder
and now you must seek balance.”

(I hope)

Heather

Strangely enough, I'm alive without your love
and don't mind nearly as much as I should.
I may forget this small fact, though,
when you tell me you met a new girl
and she watches the news
and thinks video games are a valuable way to
 spend time
and actually likes your goatee.
But I will remember that you snore
and forget to cut your fingernails sometimes
and you can't remember the last time you tipped a
 waitress
and it will all come back to me.
(I hope)

Dreams

Bradley Gellert

As a man on the moon
looks back at the earth,
the breath of life awakens
after sleeping since birth.

As a child on earth
gapes up towards the moon,
life is much too precious
to end this soon.

Doppelgaenger

David Rettker

I look at her and I know her.

With a word she could possess me for a lifetime.

But she already does.

She walks quickly and hunchback when alone,

Tall and slow when not.

Smokes Camels.

I start the day with hopes of knowing her..

Then I imagine the rest of my life without her.

I look at her and hate my friends.

poems by

Rachel Barlage

On the Verge of Orgasm

Rachel Barlage

"Is anyone sitting here?" he smiled,
nodding at the empty chair beside me.
As he walked past me, his corduroy-covered
legs brushing my knees, I trembled midbreath
and inhaled until my lungs were filled
with his smell. He sat down beside me,
our arms touching, and as the speaker began,
I leaned toward him to get a better
view, and to inhale his intoxicating aroma.
I couldn't place the fragrance, but
it made me dizzy, taking me away
from myself. The wavering voice of the
old man in the front of the room faded
as voices often did in high school, when,
anemic, having skipped one meal too many,
I passed out, but this time I felt no
unpleasant ringing inside my head, no
nausea. In a perfume-induced ecstasy,
the coughing, whispering, and shifting of people
in rows of hard wood chairs slipped
from my consciousness. Even his presence,
his body so close to mine, was secondary

to the hazy scent that made my bottom lip throb and my fingers tingle. The fine, blonde hairs on my bare arms stood up as they did when my Aunt Irene used to sit behind me and brush my hair until I melted in euphoria. Eyes closed, head bent toward his body, so close I could hear his breath, I had to stop myself from lowering my head to his shoulder and falling into a trance, to be awakened by a brush of lips on my flushed cheek. At the thought of his lips on my skin, I opened my eyes and fought the impulse to take his hand in mine, to press my fingertips to his soft skin. The desire was overwhelming. Just as I shoved my hands in my pockets to stop myself from taking the “pull here” lever in my hand and yanking down hard when I pass a fire alarm in an empty hallway, I wrote meaningless notes so my hand wouldn’t act on this impulse, without my consent. I trembled, ached, sat on the edge of my wooden folding chair on the verge of orgasm.

The Mailman

Rachel Barlage

I was sitting high in the branches of our flowering crab apple tree, looking down at the brown curls that fell to his chin, bounced as he moved. He didn't seem to walk, exactly. Rather he strolled, lazy and almost unconcerned. If he got to the mailboxes, that was fine, and if the mail wasn't delivered until midnight, at least he had enjoyed the day. Compared to our last mailman, who carried a Walkman, wore a red bandana, and had a tangled ponytail that reached halfway down his back, who cut across the lawn, never smiling, always in a hurry, this man seemed surprisingly happy. The other mailman had entered the Royal Oak post office early last week and killed seven people, eight including himself. When I saw his face on the news, I thought of his hands on our Christmas cards, his fingers touching the letters of friends. After the last mailman, who had walked past me without a nod of acknowledgement, I was surprised

when this man, dressed in worn postal blue, stopped and looked up at me from the winding path below. Wiping his brow and smiling widely, "I'm Rocky!" he called. "My dad used to call me Rocky." I squinted in the July sunlight. "Yeah? Well I think you are Anne of Green Gables. Look at you sitting in the flowers with a book." He was the least rushed mailman I had ever conversed with, and in the future, he would help my mom take in the groceries before continuing on his route. "I like the company," he would insist when Mom thanked him. "It's The Metamorphosis." He was stretching his neck to read the title. "Has it given you unsettling dreams?" Surprised, I guess snobbishly so, by his familiarity with the book, I asked if he liked Kafka. He did. Glancing at his hand, which shielded his eyes from the afternoon sun, I noticed that he was not wearing a wristwatch. I smiled, growing fonder of my mailman with every observation I made, and with every second that he stood beneath me, looking up into the branches.

Summer Saturdays (II)

Rachel Barlage

Arms flying at my sides,
I was spinning in the front yard,
falling and staining the knees
of my favorite jeans green
despite my mom's warnings
from the kitchen window,
when Dad, after reading the paper and
doing breakfast dishes,
emerged from the still-cool house,
our outside blanket in his
browned arms, and,
stopping under the tallest maple,
flapped the blanket in the air
over my head
and let it float
to the ground, landing at my feet.

Dad sighed as he lowered himself
slowly to the ground.
Smiling, he patted the empty spot beside him,
and I dove onto the blanket,
stretching my body
out on its nubby softness.

Lying next to each other
we looked up into the leaves
of the rooted trees
that reached into the sky.
The sunlight, seeping through the trees
and resting on my face,
warmed my eyelids
and cleared my mind.
I felt peaceful, content.

My younger sister, her cornsilk hair
dancing lightly around her face in the
flower-scented breeze,
let the tireswing pull her in circles, and
dizzy and tired of the game,
she walked unsteadily toward the blanket
and joined us in our silence.

"Look up there,"
Dad whispered,
shielding his eyes from the
filtered sunlight
with his huge hand.
We placed our child-sized
fingers over our eyes and
looked
 up,
 up,
 up into the leaves.

Dad soon removed his hand from his eyes
and slipped it over the other,
which rested behind his head.
Bodies still for timeless eternities,
we lay three across on the worn
brown blanket. When Dad's eyes
fluttered gradually closed
and we heard the heavy
sound of his breathing and finally
his deep-sleep snore,
we knew to rise slowly from his side
and run to the sandbox.

Grandma's Beauty Shop

Jaleen Deardurff

The brown leather chair, cracked and worn, was their favorite attraction. A boy and his two sisters would spin around, swirling and squeaking, until they got caught! Two hairdryers, big pink vinyl chairs with huge metal hoods that roared so loudly that no one could hear anything while getting their hair dried. Sometimes, the girls would have to sit under the dryer after Grandma had curled their hair. Then their brother would stand in front of them, make faces and move his lips as if he were talking to them, but the girls knew he wasn't really saying anything, so they just laughed at him.

The smell of perm solution and hair color stung their eyes, burned their nostrils, and there was always a pile of hair — gray, brown, black, and blonde — some straight, some curly, resembling a small shaggy dog that had been scolded and sent to the corner. Next to the shaggy dog hair pile was a metal cart with plastic drawers that held hair rollers of various sizes and colors. The children thought they looked like bristled Tootsie Rolls, but Grandma always knew which ones to use. In the oak desk was a drawer full of assorted hair brushes. When told to brush their hair, the children would pick out their favorite color. They had only one hair brush at home.

Grandma, tall and slim, stood in her starched uniform, her fingers making the scissors snap viciously, making wisps of hair fall to the floor — hair that would end up in the shaggy

dog pile. Grandma talked, the customer talked. The children ran out of the shop when they spied the customer up the walk, but they could hear her talking to Grandma through the heavy gold colored drapery that separated the shop from the house. When curiosity got the best of them, the children took turns peeking through the drape, parting it slightly so they could get a good look with one eye. As shyness wore off, they would poke their entire head through the drape, and eventually there would be three heads with matching brown hair, sticking through the drapery, until the customer spoke to them, and then the children would quickly disappear behind the drape, falling into a fit of giggles.

Sometimes, if the children knew Grandma's customer, they would tip-toe quietly into the shop and slip into a green vinyl chair. Directly in front of the chair was a small display case that held various bottles of shampoo and hair conditioner that were for sale, and brightly painted ceramic birds to make the display prettier. The children admired the birds' painted beauty, yet they felt sorry for their soulless little bodies that would never sing or fly away.

Now, like the ceramic birds, the shops is silent and soulless, but vivid and colorful memories will live forever in the now grown children. Nostalgia burns their eyes, and stings in their nostrils as fond memories sing quietly in their hearts, but will never fly away.



When Irish Eyes Are Smiling

Amy Ceadar '88

They were always the most unlikely pair, even from the day they met in kindergarten. Seamus Calhoun was a short, wiry, little green-eyed redhead. His grandmother always called him "our little leprechaun." And he was about as easy to catch as one, too.

Kaytonia Mokijewski was tall with dark hair and eyes and darker skin. She had the prettiest thick, wavy, black hair. Her mother used to brush it a hundred strokes every night. Then she would work it into one long braid.

Kaytonia always wanted to be a movie star. She used to love all those movie musicals. And all those Marilyn Monroe movies. Oh, was there ever anyone as pretty as Marilyn Monroe?

Unfortunately, Kaytonia also liked her grandma's pierogi. Far too much it seemed.

Seamus didn't care. Kaytonia loved to do all kinds of boy stuff. Most girls don't. They don't want to get their dresses dirty.

Before long, the friends were spending nearly every waking moment together. At his house they played pirates and cops and robbers. At her house they did girl stuff which he did not like very much. Playing house there meant he had to do all the "cleaning" and "cooking."

"Why?" Seamus complained.

"Because I'm the wife and I'm the boss. And if you don't like it you can leave."

That wasn't as bad as her favorite game — makeover. She made him

dress up in one of her mom's old dresses. And — oh, the indignity of it all! — she would put makeup on him and curl his hair.

I mean what if the guys saw?

One time they did. He was teased for almost a year. So he was forced to play with her. Like he had another choice?

One day Kaytonia's mother called him a "nice boy."

"Mother, he is not a boy. He's Seamus. Seamus is a Seamus," Kaytonia said.

One day in third grade, Seamus asked Kaytonia to "marry" him.

"Only if we can't get anybody else. And only to have someone to pay half the bills," said Seamus. "I mean I would never really kiss a girl. Or even you."

One day during recess a bunch of kids got bored. So they decided that someone should get "married." They drew lots and Seamus and Kaytonia "won." They exchanged wedding bands made of gum wrappers.

The two began to fight a lot. It nearly tore them apart. So they had no choice but to get "divorced." It was the most hellish three days two people ever spent.

In the spring the kids came up with a new game during recess. It was called "Kiss or Kill." Each sex took turns being it. You would chase each other and if you caught someone you asked them what they wanted. Kiss or Kill? If you chose the first you were obviously kissed. The second and you were punched in the tummy as hard as possible.

You had to play. Only the nerdy kids refused to play. The friends decided on a plan. They would only catch each other. They developed a secret signal. A blink of the left eye meant a kiss, the right eye meant kill. If you did one or the other it meant you were in love.

Yuck! You couldn't have anyone think you actually liked kissing someone. On the lips? You do have a certain reputation to uphold you know. Kiss or Kill lasted until the eighth grade when kissing stopped being gross.

Kaytonia and Seamus never kissed again. By the time they started high school, Seamus was a little heartbreaker. He was still the same old shrimp though.

He dreamed of becoming a jockey. He had grown up around horses. He even had a part-time job as a stable boy near Churchill Downs.

Kaytonia would always get very depressed when they were going to have a dance at the high school. She never got asked to the dance. Then good old Seamus would show up at the last minute and say he was dumped. He always gave her his date's flowers.

After the Senior Prom, Kay asked Seamus, "Why can't I ever get a date? You're great and everything, don't get me wrong. But don't you ever resent getting stuck with me all the time?"

"What makes you feel that anyone would ever be 'stuck' with you? You're a beautiful girl," Seamus answered. "Besides, I paid off all the other boys so they wouldn't ask you out."

"You're teasing me," Kaytonia said.

"Have you ever noticed that all the corsages always match your dresses?" Seamus said.

"Let's just go. You're a character," Kaytonia said.

Years later she learned it was true.

Kaytonia went on to be a famous actress — a great star of Broadway musicals. Seamus was always her best buddy. He was there at every opening night when he wasn't working. Still only five-feet-two-inches tall and looking every bit the "leprechaun," he was her biggest fan.

He certainly wasn't what anyone would think of as Prince Charming. Anyone but Kay, that is. He grew on you.

They stayed very close. Seamus became a jockey after graduation. Kay was there for all his important races. When she had the time off she would see him race any time.

He was one of the winningest jockeys ever. He even once won the Triple Crown riding Tapdancing Termite.

The next year was the most tragic of their lives. Kaytonia gave Seamus a hug and kiss before the race like she always did for good luck. She took her place in the stands. This was his second Kentucky Derby and people talked about him sweeping the Triple Crown a second time.

The world watched in horror as Seamus fell off his horse, Jude's Jewel, and was trampled. They were out in front at the time of the accident. News stations still run the footage of the horrible accident.

The horse broke two legs so badly that it had to be destroyed. Race tracks the world over flew their flags at half-mast for a week in Seamus' memory. It is still referred to as the blackest day in Derby history. Seamus was only 25.

Kaytonia was inconsolable. She hated herself for never telling him that she loved him. She didn't know who she missed more, the only love of her life or her best friend.

A package arrived six months after his death. She gasped when she saw it. It was beautiful.

It was a jewelry box with shamrocks on it. She was curious. Where did it come from? The mark on the bottom said "Made in Ireland." Ireland? That's what the postmark said — Dublin, Ireland. She didn't know anyone in Ireland. And she knew she didn't order it.

She opened it up and inside was a note, an envelope and a strange ring she had never seen before. The letter read:

"I am Elizabeth Calhoun, Seamus' grandmother from Dublin. Sweet-heart, I just wanted you to know that he did love you as much as you loved him. But he was truly shy deep down. He felt that you were too much of a lady for him. Open the envelope enclosed. See the little gumwrapper ring he gave you when you got 'married' in recess? He kept it all these years. You still have yours?"

Indeed she did. It was still in her keepsake box.

"He always referred to you as Irish Eyes. He said that though you tried to deny it, you had to be Irish. Anyone with the same impish glint in the eye as him had to have a leprechaun running around the old family tree somewhere.

"The jewelry box is his wedding present to you. He was trying to work up his nerve to propose. He wanted you to honeymoon here.

"The other ring is my wedding ring. The Claddagh is the Irish symbol of love and friendship. The hands represent friendship, the heart love, and the crown loyalty. I would like to have met you."

Kaytonia did finally get to meet Grandma Calhoun. They became very good friends. Grandma was certain that Seamus would have been proud that she named her first son after him.

When she talked about Seamus to her children and grandchildren Kaytonia always called him her "first" husband. ▣

Gates to Freedom

Gideon

Looking across the barrier
to the splendor of paradise,
being held back by the chains
of my past,
wanting so much to taste the sweet beauty
of forever.

The purity of this paradise
is taunting, singing, calling to me;
sweet echoes reverberating
through the endless time like fairies
caressing my cold cheek with their warmth,
giving me not a piece of eternity.



Adventure Headquarters

Faith Sievers

I opened the door to the basement, and instantly felt a cold current of damp, musty air sweep past me. It smelled like soil. It smelled like our garden in the spring. It smelled like the mud down by the creek we catch crawdads in. Johnnie wrinkled his nose and then looked at me with a mixture of disgust and excitement.

I felt in the darkness for the light switch. The damp concrete crumbled beneath my fingers and rattled on the stairs below. I shivered, although it was summer, partly because the basement was the same cool temperature year round, and partly because the feel of the old wall was a little creepy.

Finding the edge of the light plate, I slid my hand along the carved ebony and pushed in the top button. A bare bulb flickered below, and shadows swayed ever so slightly as it swung slowly from the ceiling. I let my hand linger for a moment on the buttons. I loved the cool smooth feel of the mother-of-pearl capped buttons.

The light switch was always comforting because because it was so beautiful and ornate, even in such a raw unfinished place. Johnnie was captivated by it too. "Wow! Dat's wee-ud," he said. "I neva seen one wid buddins."

He played with it for a moment, pushing in the bottom button so that the top one would pop out, pushing in the top one so the bottom one would pop out. I sighed in exasperation (although I had done that myself a few times). He was being silly and childish, and we were trying to go on

an adventure.

"C'mon. Let's get down there before Mom asks us what we're doin'," I urged.

"Bud I wanna know why dis ting is he-uh," he whined.

I thought about it for a moment. I'd often asked myself that question. Over time it had been answered slowly in bits of information from neighbors and little questions to Mom.

"It's 'cause the house is old," I told him.

Supposedly it had been everything from a dance hall to an apartment complex, but it had originally been the huge house of a wealthy farmer; the city had just grown up around it. When Mom had re-finished some of the rooms we found layer upon layer of faded wallpaper and linoleum. And the walls that she knocked out had big double-sided fireplaces in them and stuff. What amazed me most was that everything was held together with square nails!

As I descended the creaking stairs, I hooked my thumbs on the straps of my backpack and held my head down, for the ceiling was low. It's not like my little seven year old head was at risk of bumping into anything, but that is how mom did it, so of course that is what I did too. I watched my footing carefully as each step was of a different width and the wood was worn into smooth depressions like shallow bowls. Dust covered everything, making footing treacherous.

Once at the bottom of the stairs, I turned to check on Johnnie. He trailed one hand along the wall and descended the stairs slowly, right foot first every time. I shook my head thinking how much more fun it would be if one of my friends could have come over today.

Turning back, I made my way along a thin wooden plank that lay on the dirt floor in the basement, for the floor was wet and muddy (as it often was) because of the summer storm that continued on outside. The limestone walls were made of loose stone balanced on wedged, and water seeped through.

Hearing a splash, I looked back only to see Johnnie tromping right the water. "You're so stupid!" I cried. "Mom's gonna kill you!"

His face fell for a moment, but then he stood up straight, stuck out his chin, and looked me in the eye. "Nuh uh... Mom likthe me more dan you anyways," he said. "Besise, Ah'm li' and Ah'm cute."

I scowled and let him splash about, but I continued to follow a path of boards and stepping stones. On one particularly long jump I nearly knocked into a tall shelf full of jars that contained all the preserves and pickles that Mom had just finished canning. In my effort to avoid a collision, I leaned against one of the rough, irregular pieces of limestone. Anchored to it was a big rusty iron ring.

I regained my balance and stood a moment looking at it curiously. My little brother wanted to know what I was doing. "Whutcha wookin' at, huh?" he asked. "Wet me see." Frowning, I looked at him, shook my head, and shrugged. "I don't know," I replied, "some sort of handle or something."

I reached over and grabbed it. It was cold and wet. Involuntarily I let it drop. It clanged back onto the stone and echoed through the basement.

"Maybe this used to be a dungeon, and they tied prisoners to this!" I said excitedly. "I'm going to send you on a mission, okay? Look around, and see if there are any more."

Glad that I had given him an adventure assignment, Johnnie wandered off like a puppy dog and examined the walls one by one. After a few minutes he splashed back. "I don' tink dare are any mower," he said as if he was answering a question on a test and was afraid of getting it wrong.

"Are you sure?" I questioned, looking at him sternly. He nodded slowly. I was disappointed. "Well, I wonder what else it could be for," I said, thinking out loud.

I reached for the metal ring again. I let it rest on my palm like people do when they have something in each hand and are comparing weight. Then I let it fall again so that I could hear the hollow clang. The echo sounded weird.

"Wudduya think?" I asked him.

"Puw it," was Johnnie's answer, so I did. Nothing happened, so I yanked it harder; still no result. I was getting frustrated and was about to give up on it. Experimentally I gave the ring a twist in a last-ditch effort. At first I thought nothing happened, but hearing a creak I glanced about.

To my utter amazement, the shelf of canned goods had swung forward a little. There seemed to be a passageway of some sort behind it!

My face lit up and I clapped my hands in excitement.

"Yes!" I cried. "I knew it had to do something! Look Johnnie— I opened a door." Frightened and astonished, he just looked at me with wide eyes.

I grabbed onto the shelf and gave it a tug. Reluctantly it groaned on huge hinges, but the weight of the jars helped me to swing it further open. Behind it lay a dark, gaping doorway.

"I'm weawy thcad," Johnnie quavered. "Wet's get Mom."

I looked up at the ceiling for a moment, and studying the irregular rafters and watching the thin transparent sheets of cobwebs ripple in the draft created by the open cellar door. "No," I said decisively. "We came down here for an adventure, and that's just what we found."

With my heart beating wildly, I swung my backpack from my shoulders and placed it before me on the narrow board. Crouching, I searched through all of my adventure supplies until I found a flashlight. Johnnie whimpered, and I hesitated for a moment, knowing he was wet and cold and scared.

"C'mere," I whispered, switching on the flashlight and holding it in my right hand. He stood for a moment looking at me, and in his hurry and excitement he tripped as he reached out for my extended left hand.

Perhaps his shoe had become untied, perhaps the water had soaked into his cuffed pants legs making it hard to walk. It seemed as if he fell in slow motion; and I was frozen in place. I could not move. I could not stop his fall.

I heard a scream ring out, and it echoed. Johnnie was hydroplaning toward the doorway head-first. I lunged toward him and managed to grab his leg, but it was too late. Both of us kept sliding.

After falling down a few steps with the clatter of the flashlight in my ears, I found myself on the wet floor of a small room. The flashlight dimly illuminated the rough walls and the wooden benches that lined them.

I disentangled myself from Johnnie and he scrambled to his feet. As soon as I was sitting upright he climbed onto my lap. His little round face was red, and his eyes were the size of ping pong balls. As we sat there in an inch or two of water, he was silent. I held him close and his little body trembled against mine. His small taut belly heaved.

I heard a door creak and turned in fear, expecting that the door had swung shut and we were trapped—and without my adventure backpack too! Thankfully I still saw light through the door. In fact, I saw a face and cried out with a start.

A voice broke the silence. “What in God’s name are you doing down here!” It was Mom. She was angry, but we were glad to see her. Scrambling to our feet, we poured out a shower of explanations and bits of story in unison as she descended the short flight of stairs. She told us to slow down.

Once at the bottom she stooped to pick up the flashlight and inspected the chamber in awe. “Well I’ll be damned,” she breathed in amazement. “You kids have found the secret passage that was used to help hide runaway slaves. Old Mr. Kowalawicz next door told me about it, but I thought he was just telling stories.”

She scooped up Johnnie, propped him on her hip, and pulled me to her. We all looked about us as our imaginations ran for a few moments. Only the trickle of running water could be heard.

Then she put Johnnie down, and looked at us for a moment. Her hands on her hips, she continued, “You know, you really shouldn’t have been down here rootin’ around. You could have gotten hurt...or worse.” she finished. Neither of us said anything. We were waiting for our sentence. I wondered whether we would get spanked or not.

Suprisingly she just called us forward and gave us each a big hug. “I’m so glad you’re all right,” she whispered thankfully. “Let’s go wash up and have some lunch. Then we can come back down together and look around some more.”

So off we went. I was glad that we did not get into trouble, and excited about our find. Our biggest punishment was having to wait until after lunch.

“Mom,” I said, as we climbed the cellar stairs, “could that be our hideout and stuff?”

“Maybe,” she answered, “we have to make sure it’s safe and all first though.”

“Yes!” I said excitedly. “New adventure headquarters.” ▣